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TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF THE OPÉRA (1669-1919)

By J.-G. PROD'HOMME

“**A**NNO 1669.”—This hybrid inscription, which may be read above the curtain of the *Académie nationale de musique*, reminds the spectators that our foremost lyric stage is a creation of Louis XIV, like its elder sisters the academies of painting and sculpture, of dancing, of inscriptions and belles-lettres, of sciences, and the Academy of Architecture, its junior. In turn royal, national, imperial, following the changes of government, it has survived them all, having had within itself its revolutions, musical or otherwise, its periods of glory or decadence, its golden years or seasons of mediocrity; now in the lead of the musical movement, and again constrained to float with the currents of foreign influence; but always inviting the envy of some elements and the curiosity of others.

Celebrating its two hundred and fiftieth anniversary, what other lyric stage in the world can boast an equal longevity? Unquestionably, the Paris Opéra was not the first in Europe to be opened to the public. Before it, Venice had had opera houses accessible to the bourgeois and the general public; but, while their existence is no more than a memory, the Parisian “grand opéra,” surviving all revolutions in politics or of taste, has continued—sometimes, as it were, against its will—an unbroken tradition which, despite its imperfections, is not wanting in grandeur.

The history of the Opéra presents a striking parallel to that of France itself, and at times to that of Europe. How many events have originated or found an echo within this creation of royalty, in this hall which, since its foundation, has rejoiced in the privilege of attracting the curiosity and exciting the malevolence of the public! One could not hope to follow the details of its history, even in several volumes; but, with the aid of the numerous sources at present at our disposition, it is possible to give a summary sketch of its salient outlines. This is what has been attempted in the following pages, with no ambition beyond presenting a general description of the evolution of our great lyric theatre under its various aspects from 1669 down to our own days.

I

The offspring of the Court Ballet (which was in high favor since the epoch of the Valois, at least) and the Italian opera (originated at Florence toward the end of the sixteenth century and imported into France by Mazarin), the Paris Opéra was officially founded in 1669. The Italians invited to Paris by the cardinal for the diversion of the queen-mother and the court, had brought out there, from 1645 to 1662, *La Finta Pazza* by Giulio Strozzi, *Egisto* by Cavalli, *Orfeo* by Luigi Rossi, *Le Nozze di Pelleo e Tetide* by Caproli, and finally, for the wedding festivities of Louis XIV, in 1660, the opera *Xerse*, and two years thereafter *Ercole amante*. These works, new to French ears, and played by Italian virtuosi with most luxurious costumes and decorations, attracted all the court, and even certain plain citizens, to the Palais-Royal, the Tuileries, or the Petit-Bourbon. However, reports are contradictory concerning the reception accorded Mazarin's operas by the aristocratic audience of Maria de' Medici. While the "Italianizers," then very numerous at court, took great delight in these spectacles, the French complained that they could not understand a word; and epigrams were coined on

Ce beau mais malheureux Orphée,
Ou pour mieux parler, ce Morphée,
Puisque tout le monde y dormit.

[This handsome but unhappy Orpheus,
Or I should rather say, this Morpheus,
For every one there fell asleep.]

Certain gazetteers or novelists of the time, like Lorot in his *Muze historique*, thought *Xerse* "excessively long" because it lasted "over eight hours and more" (plus de huit heures et davantage). They could make nothing out of the transalpine opera; and so the libretto of *Ercole amante* is provided with a French translation facing the original text, and versified.

The French, who for some years had been possessed of the classic tragedy, owed it to themselves not to lag behind their neighbors, and to adopt (if not to adapt) the *dramma* or *opera per musica* of the Italians. But there was, *inter alia*, a prejudice to be overcome, and one which Jean-Jacques Rousseau took upon himself to defend a century later—that only the Italian language (so it was said) or Latin was suited to music.

Already, in the Théâtre du Marais, the influence of the lyric representations at the court was making itself felt; pieces in

which stage "machines" were employed, such as Corneille's *Andromède*, Boyer's *Ulysse* (both in 1650), Quinault's *La Comédie sans comédie* (1654), Boyer's *Les Amours de Jupiter et de Sémélé* (1666), are themselves operas of a sort or, if one prefer, fairy spectacles, accompanied by music played and sung. There was lacking only the recitative, the disappearance of spoken dialogue, for the creation of the opera.

The first French stage-piece entirely in music appears to have been *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, by Beys and Laguerre (1655), which preceded by four years the famous *Pastorale* by Perrin and Cambert. Perrin of Lyons, abbé Perrin, the starveling poet, and one of the victims of Boileau, was chief Master of Ceremonies with Gaston d'Orléans. Having observed what chances of success stage-pieces with music might have, like those of the Italians, provided that they were intelligible for French ears, he laboriously put together a dramatic poem for musical setting, and sought to create a musical speech to fit the poem. In spite of the vulgarisms and trivialities of his inspiration, one may say that he succeeded.

He associated himself with Robert Cambert, organist at the church of Saint-Honoré, and later to the queen-mother. The fruit of this collaboration was a *Pastorale*, produced in the Parisian suburb of Issy at the residence of M. de La Haye in April, 1659, and before the king, at Vincennes, some weeks subsequently. Mazarin's keen eye noted that the attempt of Perrin and Cambert did not displease his youthful sovereign; he therefore encouraged the poet to continue his endeavors. Perrin, already having a musician, now found another partner, de Rieux, Marquis of Sourdéac, for the purpose of establishing an opera-theatre. But the death of Mazarin in March, 1661, caused the indefinite postponement of the project. Pertinaciously pursuing his plan, Perrin finally (on June 28, 1669) obtained from the young king letters-patent for "academies of opera or representations in music and in the French language, on the footing of those of Italy." This was the first title of the future Royal Academy of Music. Perrin had represented to the king that operas "provide at present the most agreeable divertissements, not only in the cities of Rome, Venice, and other courts of Italy, but likewise in the cities and courts of Germany and England, where the aforesaid Comedies have similarly been established in imitation of the Italians." The king gave permission to Perrin "to take from the public such sums as he should deem advisable," making "very express inhibitions and prohibitions respecting all persons of whatsoever quality

or condition, even the officers of our household, to enter without paying; and to cause to be sung such operas or representations in music with French verses, throughout our kingdom, during twelve years." . . . This privilege decreed, furthermore, that "all *gentils-hommes, damoiselles*, and other persons may sing the aforesaid operas without derogation, by so doing, of the titles of nobility or of their privileges."

Armed with these letters-patent, Perrin set to work with Robert Cambert as composer and the Marquis of Sourdéac as scenic director (this Norman nobleman having a passion for the stage with all manner of mechanical accessories, and who had mounted Corneille's *Toison d'or* in 1660 at his château of Neufbourg); with Beauchamps as ballet-director, and de Bersac de Champeron as joint commissioner.

While a musician—probably La Crille—set out to recruit singers of both sexes in Languedoc, the home of beautiful voices, a search was made for an auditorium wherein to install the future theatre. On October the 8th, 1670, Sourdéac and Champeron hired for five years, at the rate of 2400 livres per annum, the hand-tennis court known as de la Bouteille, situated between Mazarine and de Seine streets, opposite the rue Guénégaud (just at the place where a new street, the rue Jacques Callot, has been cut through). The hall was constructed in five months by Guichard, building-superintendent to the Duke of Orléans; and the theatre was ready for inauguration on March the 19th, 1671, with *Pomone*, a pastourelle by Perrin and Cambert, in three acts preceded by a prologue. *Pomone*, like the *Pastourelle* of Issy, was merely a suite of airs and dialogues between shepherds and shepherdesses; the representation occupied about two hours and a half. For eight months all Paris thronged to hear it, although a seat in the parterre cost half a louis d'or; the attendance was such that clashes took place between the citizens and the pages, lackeys and men in livery who sought to enter in the train of their masters, as they did at other spectacles. It was necessary to promulgate a royal ordinance to prevent them from entering gratis.

Did Perrin, as has been asserted, derive a profit of 10,000 crowns from the first season of the French Opéra? It is hardly probable, for a short time afterward we see him hounded for debts and thrown into jail on complaint of his associate, Sourdéac; while Cambert applied, for a second libretto, to Gabriel Gilbert, author of the *Peines et Plaisirs de l'Amour*; and, lastly, we find him glad to arrange with Lully for the cession of his privilege, after having previously ceded it, first to the poet Guichard and

then to the Sieur de Sablière, neither of whom was capable of exploiting it.

Saint-Evremont, in his comedy of the *Opéras*, in which he does not invariably show a tenderness for this new species of the drama, thus passed judgment on Cambert's two works: "One gazed on the machines with surprise, on the dances with pleasure (so he remarks apropos of *Pomone*); one listened to the songs with enjoyment, to the words with disgust." He found the second opera "more polished and refined. The voices and the instruments were already better trained for performing their parts. The Prologue was fine; the Tomb of Climène was admired." . . . He especially noticed a trio of flutes, such as had never been heard "since the Romans."

Nevertheless, Lully, the superintendent of the king's music, having arranged matters with Perrin in consideration, "no doubt, of a considerable present" (so say the brothers Parfait), the king, who honored him (Lully) with high regard, transferred Perrin's privilege to him in the month of March (probably the 13th), 1672. Hence, an inextricable series of lawsuits between Sourdéac and Champeron, on the one part, and Guichard and Sablières on the other, revolve around this privilege of Perrin's, ceded twice in abrupt succession. But the affair was brought to a swift conclusion as regards Lully. On March 24 Colbert wrote to the Attorney-General of the Assembly, de Harley, to decide the case as soon as possible. Six days later the king himself gave orders to have the hall in the rue Mazarine closed from the 1st of April onward. On June 27 a decree of the Assembly terminated the affair, ordering the registration of the letters-patent and condemning Sourdéac and Champeron to indemnify Perrin, Cambert, and the singers of the Opéra. Very soon the war broke out again between Lully and his adversaries. It lasted three years, accompanied by a flood of acrimonious controversial literature.

Thus the French Opéra was born in a welter of chicanery; and we owe to these same controversial pamphlets (which were not all destroyed, as was ordered by the decree of August the 12th, 1677), many a bit of information concerning the infancy of the Académie royale de musique.

Cambert left Paris later, and went to live in England at the court of Charles II; Lully's enemies declared that he brought about Cambert's assassination in 1677. Guichard betook himself to Madrid, to attempt to found another opera there. As for the artists of the troupe, the "demoiselles" Aubry and Brigogne, and the "sieurs" Clédières, Beaumavielle, Tholet, Miracle, and

some others, unknown to us, were taken by Lully into the troupe he was forming. He selected the hand-tennis court of Bel-air in the rue de Vaugirard, on the eastern boundary of the Luxembourg Gardens (where the rue de Médicis now runs), and there, without delay (on Nov. 13, 1672), he brought out a pastorale, *Les Fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus*, with text by Molière, Benserade and Quinault. This he did, so to speak, simply in order to signalize his taking possession of the Académie royale de musique, the title under which the French Opéra was thenceforward known until the Revolution.

The following year, 1673, marks two notable events—the death of Molière on Feb. 17, and two months later (April 27?) the first representation of *Cadmus et Hermione*, the opening number of that uninterrupted series of lyric tragedies which Lully and Quinault were to produce until they died, and of which several lived for an entire century, until the advent of Gluck.

The disappearance of Molière afforded the Florentine [Lully] a more or less generous opportunity to expel the Comédiens français from the Palais-Royal, and to install himself in their stead. On the day after, the king conceded this auditorium to him, and the troupe of Molière had no other resource than to take refuge in Perrin's old hall in the rue Guénégaud; and Lully celebrated on January the 19th, 1674, his entry into the Palais-Royal with a representation of *Alceste*.

Writing solely for his own theatre, with the almost exclusive collaboration of Quinault, Lully produced, down to his death in 1686, fourteen lyric tragedies, besides several pastorales, idyls, mascarades and ballets, and, however he might be engrossed by the direction of the Opéra and the care of his personal affairs, a certain number of scores performed at court during the same period. The artistic heritage which he gave to posterity was somewhat like the empire of Alexander, despite all the minute precautions he had taken. For no one was ready to take his place in his various incarnations of director, administrator, supervisor of the ballets as well as the costumes and the scenic decorations, the singers, the choruses and the orchestra; having only one assistant, the "machinist" Vigarani, and retaining under his supervision his two "batteurs de cœur" and sole occasional collaborators, Lalouette and Colasse. At the close of his singularly fortunate career—having amassed through speculation a fortune of 800,000 francs, probably equal to four millions to-day—he had veritably created French opéra, had formed a troupe of singers and instrumentalists which excited the admiration of Europe,

trained by a discipline which was relaxed when he passed away. "He had them all so well in hand that they received without protest whatever he dealt out to them," says Lecerf de le Viéville. "I can assure you that, under Lully's control, the men-singers would not have had colds six months of the year, nor would the women-singers have been drunk four days of the week."

Quelle pitié pour l'Opéra
Depuis qu'on a perdu Baptiste.

[Evil days for the Opéra since they lost Baptiste.]

So they sang, ten years after his death. Jean-Louis Lully, the younger, having survived his father by only one year, the Opéra passed into the hands of his brother-in-law Jean-Nicolas Francine, whose family, Florentine like that of Lully, furnished the king for a century with a whole line of hydraulic engineers, or *fontaniers* (fountaineers) as they were more simply styled at the time of Louis XIV.

With Francine begin, in the administration of the Opéra, the financial combinations which, so to say, pursue each other without interruption down to our day. Sometimes the royal privilege was a source of advantages which some one or other tried to snap up, or—and this was oftenest the case—a cause of worries and deficits, which the owner of the privilege sought to unload, either upon the King, or on the City of Paris. Francine associated himself with Hyacinthe de Gaureau Dumont, the King's equerry and governor of Meudon; after involving themselves in debts to the extent of some 380,000 livres, Francine and Dumont in 1704 ceded their privilege to Guyenet, paymaster of the government rentes, who died in 1712, completely ruined, and leaving considerable debts, whereof 166,000 livres were due actors and employees, who threatened to go on strike. The period of difficulties began with the opening century—a period which, it is true, included the last years of Louis XIV, a time of war and wretchedness, and was anything but favorable to the arts of peace. Francine then negotiated with the creditors of Guyenet, and obtained from them a prorogation of the privilege until 1732; in exchange, he demanded of the syndicate of Guyenet's creditors 20,000 livres, and Dumont 12,000 annually. This arrangement lasted till 1721, under the exalted supervision of the duke d'Antin (appointed in 1715 by the regent) and M. de Landivisiau. From the account submitted at this time by the creditors of Guyenet it appears that in one year 161 representations yielded about 193,000 livres in receipts, or some 1200 livres per evening. The Ball, then a recent creation,

added 54,000 livres more; with further receipts from various sources (for example, the rent from the café, ground-rents from the provincial opéras, arrearages from 1720), the sum-total of receipts amounted to 402,620 livres, whereas the expenses totaled only 285,522. Nevertheless, the syndicate, having increased their debts payable by 80,000 livres, retired. Francine once more assumed the direction of the Académie royale de musique for seven years, and died in 1735, giving over the Opéra to sieur Gruër, who obtained on June 1, 1730, a concession for thirty years.

It would appear that the directorate of the aforesaid Gruër was short and merry. In partnership with a certain Lebœuf and the count of Saint-Gilles, under the chief supervision of the prince de Carignan, Gruër was dispossessed scarcely a year subsequent to his nomination, as a sequel to an incident celebrated in the annals of the Opéra. Not far from the cour du Carrousel, in the rue Saint-Nicaise, there had been established (in 1713) the "magazine" of the Opéra, serving both as a storage house for costumes and decorations, and as a school of music, the embryo of the future Conservatoire. One day in the month of June Gruër arranged with several of his friends and his artists (Mme. Pélissier, M. Petitpas, Mme. Camargo, and others) to give a little party at the magazine. The ladies, discommoded by the heat of summertime assisted by champagne, very soon made themselves so entirely comfortable as to be revealed to the neighbors in the narrow rue Saint-Nicaise in the simplest of apparel. This bacchanale, authenticated by a police report of June 15, 1731, put an end to the ephemeral reign of our too-galant director Gruër. Lecomte, his successor, held out but little longer; and in 1733 the heritage of Lully passed into the hands of an ex-captain of the Picardy regiment, Thuret, a natural son of the duke of Savoy. In this same year Rameau, already over fifty, made his début with the opéra *Hippolyte et Aricie*.

II

From Lully to Rameau—almost a half-century—there had been an insensible evolution of the opera. While the repertory of the Florentine was still in vogue, and revived with success for the most part, and his imitators, like those of Quinault, were dressing up all the mythological legends as lyric tragedies, a new genre, infinitely less stilted and more in harmony with the spirit of the time, was little by little establishing its esthetic influence. As early as 1685 the first ballet (*Les Saisons*, by Pic and Colasse), consisting of "entrées" (scenes), each of which forms a subject,

gave a foretaste of this new formula wherein song and dance share the stage, either together or alternately. It was, in a measure, a return to the earlier Ballet of the Court, but with a rigorous suppression of all declamatory parts. Two years later came *l'Europe galante*, by La Motte-Houdard and Campra; it was at once the model and the masterpiece of similar works. The epoch of this ballet marks an important interior reform in the Académie royale. Thenceforward, authors received royalties—one hundred livres for each representation up to the tenth; fifty livres from the eleventh to the twentieth (to the thirtieth, for lyric tragedies). In 1699, on the other hand, the “droit des pauvres” (a sort of poor-tax) was introduced, the prices of the seats being raised one-fifth; a seat in the parterre cost 36 sous instead of 30; the second-tier boxes 3 *l.* 12 *s.* instead of 3 *l.*; the dress-boxes 7 *l.* 4 *s.* instead of 6 *l.*

The authors of these ballets did not levy contribution solely on mythology (*Les Éléments* by Destouches; *Les Amours des Dieux*, by Mourot; *Les Stratagèmes de l'Amour*), but made excursions into foreign lands—Italy, Spain, Turkey—furnishing pretexts for exotic dances, costumes, and decorations. In *Le Carnaval de Venise* (1699, which by the way, was never revived) Campra even introduced before the end of the third act an entire short Italian opéra, *Orphée aux Enfers*. This style became so popular, that Lully's old works were searched through and through for “fragments” which were then set end to end, not without re-instrumenting them to suit the taste of modern ears. In a word, the ballet of the eighteenth century is a species of variety show.

Another revolution: In 1726, for Rebel and Francœur's *Pyrame et Thisbé*, we find as scenic artist the successor of Bérain fils, the chevalier Servandoni, whose marvelous architectural and decorative inventions were described by Le Mercure to its readers without sparing them a single detail. Three years later we notice the ephemeral emergence of two Italian intermezzi; this had no perceptible influence at the time, but several persons began to compare French music with Italian, which latter the Concert Spirituel, established at the Tuileries for the off-days of the Opéra, was already importing successfully. At the Opéra, music-lovers still frankly preferred what was afterwards called the “plain-chant” of Lully. At Eastertide in 1732 applause was bestowed impartially on *Jephté*, the first Biblical tragedy (by Montéclair), and the new decorations in the hall of the Palais-Royal, the home of the Académie for the preceding half-century.

It was within this restored frame that the masterpieces of Rameau were shown, the music of which was criticized, at the outset, as too learned, too difficult, but whose newness and harmonic richness soon pleased—for every other year *Hippolyte et Aricie* was succeeded by *Les Indes galantes*, *Castor et Pollux*, *Les Fêtes d'Hébé*, and *Dardanus*, besides ten other works, whose revivals purveyed to the Opéra until the coming of the chevalier Gluck.

With Rameau, ill-seconded in general by wretched literary collaborators, the genre created by Lully "attained to the supreme degree of perfection; the venture of the first half of the eighteenth century resulted in something of a definitive nature, in developing the 'spectacle,' in the display of the marvelous, in the scintillations of the fairy-play." (L. de La Laurencie). Rameau speedily won triumphs, both at court and in the town. The majority of his pieces were first given at Versailles or Fontainebleau, where extremely brilliant spectacles were produced toward the middle of the century. It even happened that the troupe of the Opéra, frequently called upon to assist at court festivals by the *Menus-plaisirs* of the King, was somewhat too neglectful of the Parisian stage; wherefore the successor of Thuret, François Berger (1744–1748), obtained an annual subvention of 80,000 livres for such service. However, in the first sixteen months of his directorate, he lost 250,000 livres. Hereupon the Royal Council dismissed the prince de Carignan and "gave" the Opéra to the city of Paris, under the control of minister d'Argenson. Rebel and Francœur (those musical Siamese twins, authors of a respectable number of scores penned in collaboration), Reyer and—once again—Thuret, then Bontemps and Levasseur, participated in the direction from 1749 to 1757.

Now it was that the first musical war broke out; the appearance of the Italian *bouffons* in 1752 provoked polemics of unusual violence for the ensuing two years. The *bouffons* finally forsook the field, carrying off their intermezzi; but for all that they had influenced both the public taste and French composers; this was very evident at the revival of *Castor et Pollux*, recast by Rameau after an interval of seventeen years. Furthermore, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had so vehemently taken sides against French music, brought out his French comedy-opera *Le Devin du Village* (1752), and Dauvergne produced *Les Troqueurs* at the Théâtre Italien.

The ten years of the second directorate of Rebel and Francœur offer nothing especially notable from the musical viewpoint;

they merely exploited the current repertory, from Lully to Rameau. Moreover, a sudden accident absolved them from seeking after masterworks. On the 6th of April, 1762, the hall which had been the home of the Opéra for ninety years disappeared in flames, and the Académie royale took refuge in the old "salle à machines" in the Tuileries, where chevalier Servandoni came to produce his spectacles. They were succeeded (1767-1769) by two musicians, Berton and Trial. Berton, the conductor of the theatre orchestra, relinquished the bâton to his predecessor, Francœur. The city having again taken over the Opéra, he remained at its head, with Trial, Dauvergne, and Joliveau. Result—debts amounting to 500,000 livres. It is probable that the new hall of the Palais-Royal, inaugurated on January the 16th, 1770, and trenchantly criticized (like all new auditoriums of theatres), did not attract the musical public; we find *Castor et Pollux*, in 1772, showing receipts of 500 livres for an evening, and somewhat later certain "fragments" took in even less! But on another occasion this same *Castor* brought in 3000 livres. So it came, that Louis XVI entrusted the direction to the management of his Menus-plaisirs (1776-1778).

III

The second musical war had just begun. Since two years the production of Gluck's *Iphigénie* and *Orphée* had precipitated discussions which grew yet more acrimonious with the advent of the Italian Piccinni, an ex-protégé of Mme. Dubarry. This time the arguments took a still more violent turn than at the epoch of the *bouffons*, which is partly explicable by the fact that in the meantime the periodical press had been powerfully developed. Gluck himself being championed by the first daily journal to appear in France, the *Journal de Paris*, it came to pass that the former exchange of pamphlets between the two camps was superseded by an incessant volleying of retorts in the various sheets at the disposal of either side. We should also take into consideration the growing emancipation preceding the Revolution, and the deepseated mental fermentation which characterized the reign of Louis XVI.

The struggle between the partisans of Gluck, Rameau and Piccinni turned the scale definitively in favor of the "Germanic Orpheus," as the phrase ran. In 1785 Rameau disappeared from the Opéra with *Castor et Pollux*; whereas Gluck, dominating our lyric history for half a century, maintained himself until the advent of Rossini, in the neighborhood of 1830. These fifty years of our

lyric history, taking their course amidst the events of the Revolution and the Empire, were not without glory for our French School, toward which the eyes of the great foreign composers were turned. Although Piccinni left no deep mark on the repertory, his compatriots Sacchini and Salieri presented it with two masterpieces—*Œdipe à Colonne* (1787), the most sweeping success of the old Opéra, with nearly six hundred representations, and *Les Danaïdes* (1784). Nevertheless, various currents, various tendencies, may be noted among the composers who wrote for the Opéra. The musicians of Pleasure, of the Loves and Graces, the gallant petits-maîtres of the century of Louis XV, still retained a faithful following; but the Italians on the one hand, and Gluck on the other, have arrived, and make the scores of a Mouret, a Mondonville, or even of Rameau himself, seem a trifle insipid and jejeune.

The period of Gluck marks a return to a more antique severity, —does not Gluck, and his imitators as well, take for librettists Racine himself and Quinault, dressed to suit the prevailing taste? —to an antiquity like that in vogue under Louis XVI. But, concurrently, the opera-libretto shows modernizing tendencies; under the influence of the bourgeois tragedy and the comedy-opera it becomes melodramatic; from the mythological and heroic it turns to the historical (like those by Metastasio), chivalrous and patriotic. Sentimentality, virtue à la Rameau, to which free reign were given at the Opéra-Comique (with Grétry, for example), the civic spirit awakened in the breasts of the contemporaries of Lafayette and M. de Monthyon, inspire by turns the staging of new opéras which display to our eyes the tapestries of Greuze or David, instead of confronting us with the courtly countrysides of Pater or Watteau, or the voluptuous tableaux of Boucher.

Hence the motley susceptibilities of *Le Seigneur bienfaisant*, set to music by Floquet (1780); *l'Embarras des richesses*, by Grétry (1781); *Adèle de Ponthieu*, by Laborde and Berton (1772), and reset by Piccinni in 1781; *Ernelinde, princesse de Norvège*, by Philidor (1767), one of whose choruses, "Jurez sur vos glaives sanglants," won celebrity during the Revolution; *Pizarro, ou la Conquête du Mexique*, by Candeille; *Louis IX en Égypte*, by Le-moyne.—Here and there the dawn of romanticism and realism may be glimpsed in these libretti, if not in the scores, for which latter the composers strive to appropriate the novel procedures of the chevalier Gluck. Berton and Philidor recast their works for the revivals in 1774. Beaumarchais, with Salieri, attempts a medley of all the genres.

The Revolution gave birth to productions no less astonishing, on whose creation musicians like Grétry collaborated with no sense of shame. But at that time the great lyric stage was far from monopolizing the entire musical movement. The liberty accorded to the theatres having taken away its exclusive privileges, raised up competitors—the Opéra-Comique, which had grown despite all hindrances placed in the way of its development by the Académie royale de musique, and the Théâtre Feydeau. Not until the establishment of the Empire, which limited the number of lyric scenes to three (Opéra, Opéra-Comique and Italiens) do we see it regain its lustre of oldentime.

After the conflagration of 1781, the Opéra was transferred to the boulevard Saint-Martin, occupying a hall constructed in four months—a “provisional” hall which did not disappear till 1871, and likewise by fire. The direction was now undertaken by De Vismes de Valgay, and then by Berton and Dauvergne (from 1778 to 1790); then the City of Paris once more assumed it during two years, and handed it over to Francœur (the nephew) and Cellerier, whose successors, from 1793 to 1797, were a committee, followed by a Commission of Administration. Having become, from the Tenth of August, the Théâtre des Arts, the Revolution forced it to vacate the boulevard on the eve of the 9th Thermidor, and installed it in a large and handsome hall of which citizen Montensier had been dispossessed, opposite the National Library, rue de la Loi (erewhile rue de Richelieu). Here fantastical receipts—in paper money—were realized; on the 18th Prairial of the year IV (June 6, 1796), with *Iphigénie en Tauride*, the *Hymne à la Victoire*, and the ballet of *Psyché*, there were taken in 1,071,350 livres; but, the value of the assignat being ten centimes for one hundred livres, the actual receipts amounted to 1071 livres and seven sous!

None of these divers forms of administration having proved more fortunate than the others, a certain stability in the lyric management was not attained until the arrival of the Consulate and the Empire. From 1802 to 1807 Morel-Lemoyne was director under the control of M. de Luçay, prefect of the Palace, making room for Picard (1807-1816), under the orders of the administration of theatres. The Restoration pursued the same policy.

From the Revolution to the Restoration the hall in the rue de la Loi witnessed manifestations of the most diverse nature, in which music did not always play the leading rôle. Formerly, under Louis XIV and Louis XV, the Opéra celebrated, in its prologues, the great events of the reign—royal marriages and births,

treaties of peace. Under the Revolution a whole series of patriotic works was represented, whose subjects were borrowed either from antiquity or from contemporary events. After *Le Triomphe de la République*, by Joseph Chénier and Gossec (first produced in the hall in the boulevard Saint-Martin), came *La Patrie reconnaissante*, by Candeille (six weeks before *Le Mariage de Figaro* by Mozart, words by Notaris, played only five times!); *Le Siège de Thionville*, by Jadin; *Miltiade à Marathon* and *Toute la Grèce*, by de Lemoyne; *Horatius Coclès*, by Méhul; *Toulon soumis*, an "historic incident," by Rochefort; *La Réunion du Dix Août*, a "sans-culottide in five acts and in verses interspersed with dialogue, dances, and military evolutions," by Rouquier and Moline (the librettist of Gluck's *Orphée*). "On the stage of *Iphigénie* and *Didon* only the rolling of drums, cannon-shots, bugle-calls, were now heard. The Opéra, which for more than a century had been a pagan Olympus, was suddenly transformed into a camp. . . . The public was very eager to view these moving spectacles. This is proved by the 444,539 livres of receipts during the season of 1792-3 at the Opéra." (A. de Lassalle.) *Denys le tyran*, and *La Rosière républicaine*, both by Grétry, are the last works of the revolutionary period. And for three years thereafter, down to *Anacréon chez Polycrate*, by this same Grétry, not one novelty!

Antiquity, so much in vogue before the Revolution, again came into its own on the stage under the Directory. We still take note, however, of one more patriotic "occasional piece," *La Nouvelle au camp, ou le Cri de vengeance* (June 12, 1799), suggested by the assassination of the French plenipotentiaries at Rastatt. The following year, on Christmas Eve, an incomparably more musical novelty was presented; at the Théâtre des Arts *The Creation*, by Haydn, was produced. That same evening a tragedy was enacted on the street. It will be remembered that the carriage of the First Consul, leaving the Tuileries by the rue Saint-Nicaise on the way to attend the above production, barely escaped demolition by an infernal machine. Bonaparte was a little late in arriving in the rue de la Loi, but the audience heard of nothing until the entr'acte of the oratorio.—This style of music, which for a long time had not been current in France, where it had enjoyed a certain vogue at the Concerts Spirituels in the Tuileries, very probably inspired Guillard and Lesueur to write *La Mort d'Adam* (1809), and Hoffmann and Kreutzer in penning *La Mort d'Abel* (1810). These two Biblical essays achieved only moderate success. In spite of the ballets with which Gardel had adorned Lesueur's oratorio, *La Mort d'Adam* appeared but a very

few times; the one by Kreutzer had a revival in 1823, which provoked the enthusiastic letter of the youthful Berlioz, so frequently quoted:

O genius!

I succumb! I die! My tears choke me! The Death of Abel! ye gods!—

What an infamous public! It feels nothing! What does it need, then, to move it?—

The youthful romanticist, at this time still a student of medicine, exclaims thus through a score of lines, winding up by deploring the insensibility of “these stupid oafs who are scarcely worthy of listening to the pantalooneries of that buffoon of a Rossini! Ah! GENIUS!!!—”

In sober truth, the “infamous public” would not be satisfied with the ingenious score of the worthy Kreutzer, and did not relish this pseudo-oratorio except on condition that it was followed by a ballet from the repertory. It was the same with a *Saul* by citizens Morel, Deschamps and Després, the music (?) by Kalkbrenner and Lachnith, in which these five authors had pilaged poets and composers—Racine, J.-B. Rousseau, Paisiello, Cimarosa, Händel, Haydn, Mozart, etc. This *Saul* held the stage, accompanied by a ballet, from 1803 to 1818. One of the authors of this hodge-podge, Lachnith, was the same who, two years earlier, had concocted from Mozart’s *Zauberflöte* the monstrous pasticcio entitled *Les Mystères d’Isis*, in collaboration with the same Morel (whilom de Chédeville); and it was in this form only that Mozart’s masterpiece was known, until 1827, in France!

Before the production of *La Vestale*, by Spontini, the repertory of the Académie impériale de musique offers nothing of importance except *Ossian, ou les Bardes*, by Lesueur (1804). This opera, which inaugurated the Académie “impériale” de musique, was a romantic experiment which had but slight success in spite of Lesueur’s great talent, too serious for the taste of the period. And when, for the first and only time, the decennial prize for opera founded by the Emperor was awarded, it was the Italian Spontini who won it over the French composer. The year following, Spontini triumphed again with *Fernand Cortez*, a so-called historic opéra and also a grand spectacle; the “cavalry”—sixteen horses from the stables of the Franconi circus, mounted by their grooms in sumptuous costumes all draped with gold—was not the least attraction of the show.

Insensibly the mythological opera, whose subjects, it was finally agreed, had been overworked and worn out, abandons the

field; the exalted old order passes away, to be succeeded by the historical tableau. After the tragedy, the drama; the age of Scribe is nearing.

But, the *Académie impériale* again becomes *royale*, after twenty-three revolutionary years.—The events of 1814 and 1815 did not fail to find an echo in the rue de Richelieu, formerly rue de la Loi. In the colorless repertory presented by Picard and his successors while awaiting Rossini's advent, there may be found several "occasional" pieces—at the end of the Empire *l'Oriflamme*, by Méhul, Paër, Berton, Kreutzer, and Gardel for the ballet (Feb. 1, 1814); and, during the Hundred Days, *Pélage, ou le Roi de la Paix* (April 23, 1814), by Spontini and Gardel. These titles and these dates sufficiently illuminate the general scope of these rhapsodies, hastily outfitted amid the crowded rush of events which the great official stage sought to comment upon and render manifest to the eyes of the public. But, while expecting the "happy return" of King Louis XVIII, the Opéra advertised, on April 10, 1814, *Le Triomphe de Trajan*, which was replaced at the last moment by *La Vestale*. The emperor of Russia and the king of Prussia, together with a multitude of foreign officers, assisted at the spectacle. The ancient French song *Vive Henri IV* was sung, corrupted by an improvisation on the same air: *Vive Guillaume et ses vaillants guerriers!* (Long live William and his valiant warriors!) However, the people did not vibrate precisely in unison with this royalistic enthusiasm, for the suburbs were yet smoking from the incendiary fires started by yesterday's fights.

IV

Rossini came at last! The epoch of Spontini, following the reign of Gluck and relegating the French composers to second place until Auber and Halévy, marks a revolution towards the modern opera, the "grand opera," of which the Meyerbeer series was to form the most complete expression.

The festivals and spectacles of the Revolution, on the one hand, and, on the other, the active competition with the Opéra of theatres formerly subordinated to it and in which musical internationalism already held sway, both contributed, if not to revolutionize the *Académie impériale* (now once again *royale*), at least sufficiently to hasten its progress in the direction of the romantic style so generally demanded by the public. *Le Siège de Corinthe*, by Rossini (the second version of his *Maometto II*), opened the new era which, within ten years, was to bring forth

Le Comte d'Ory, Guillaume Tell, La Muette de Portici, Robert le Diable, Les Huguenots, La Juive. And yet this score caused Vitet to write that Rossini had "carried harmonic effects to such a degree of complication, that one might be permitted to ask if he had not rendered any sort of innovation impossible." (!)

About the year 1830, music, like painting and literature, was to enter its romantic period. And this was a fortunate thing for music—fortunate in every sense of the word; because, since Lully, the reign of Louis-Philippe presents, in the person of Doctor Véron, the first director who left office without a deficit.

Replacing a Papillon de La Ferté at the head of the Menus-plaisirs (not the former head, however, for the intendant of Louis XVI had been guillotined), the Restoration had confided the Opéra to musicians: Choron and Persuis, to begin with (1816-1819); then Viotti, the renowned violinist; finally, Habeneck and Duplantys (1821-1824-1826). With Lubbert closes the *ancien régime*. The chief supervision was entrusted to the superintendent—Papillon, de Blacas, de Lauriston, the duke of Doudeauville and, lastly, viscount Sosthènes de La Rochefoucault. "The descendant of the author of the *Maxims*, viscount Louis-François Sosthènes, did not pursue with his sighs a duchess de Longueville of the Opéra (writes A. Royer); but his pious fervor seized upon the skirts of the dancers, which he caused to be made longer in order that evil thoughts might not be suggested to the spectators. . . . Under this moral administration the Opéra cost the Civil List, in the year 1827, the enormous sum of 966,000 fr., in spite of the State subvention and the 300,000 fr. obtained by a special assessment levied on secondary theatres and raree-shows."

This iniquitous assessment, deriving from the ancient privilege of the Opéra, had naturally been abolished under the Revolution. The Empire reestablished it in 1811; no ball or concert could be given unless one-fifth of the gross receipts was turned over to the Opéra. For lyric theatres the assessment was only one-twentieth (5%), the poor-tax being deducted. One could neither sing nor dance except at the Opéra or with its permission. The tax on concerts, without distinction, exercised a most untoward influence on the development of symphonic music and chamber-music in France; it made public hearings of such music well-nigh impossible.

To these taxes, estimated to yield 30,000 fr. per annum, the Restoration added two subventions—one from the Civil List, the other from the funds of the theatres.

Under the directorate of Viotti an event disastrous to the dynasty of the Bourbons caused the sudden closing of the hall in the rue de Richelieu; on Feb. 13, 1820, duke de Berry, while leaving the Opéra before the close of the performance, was assassinated by Louvel. The theatre was immediately closed, and speedily given over to the house-wreckers in obedience to the injunctions of the archbishop of Paris. During one year the Académie royale played in the Salle Favart, thereafter in the small Salle Louvois, while, on the other side of the boulevard, architect Debret, utilizing for the interior decoration a quantity of materials abstracted from the Salle de la Montensier, was constructing on the Choiseul property the theatre in the rue Le Peletier, burned down Oct. 29, 1873.

Abrogating the decree of 1811, Louis-Philippe established for the first time the modern regulations: management in partnership, and subvention (1831). Eugène Véron, physician, journalist (founder of the first *Revue de Paris*), was made Director for six years; like many others among his predecessors, he did not finish his term of office, but not for the same reasons! And now, although for one hundred and fifty years every one touching the Opéra had been ruined, Véron, thanks to his subvention, thanks also to Auber, Rossini, and Meyerbeer, retired in 1835 after amassing a fortune. His successor in office, the architect Duponchel, was less fortunate. Léon Pillet (1841–1847) continued the line of deficit-making directors. He disappeared, a victim of the cabal set on foot against the "favorite," Mme. Stoltz, leaving debts to the amount of half a million. And, notwithstanding, he had mounted *Charles V*, by Halévy, *Der Freischütz* (revised by Berlioz), *La Reine de Chypre*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Duponchel, with Roqueplan, and then this latter by himself, again undertook the direction during the difficult period between 1847 and 1854 (Girard, Habeneck's successor at the head of the orchestra, having the musical direction), and staged only one long-lived work, *Le Prophète*.

No thought was given, or had been given for a long time, to our old French musicians, or even to Gluck and his school. Nothing would do but the historical opera, the grand spectacular opera, invented by Scribe and his imitators. A recrudescence of the antique with *Sapho*, which had only nine representations, barely made the public acquainted with the name of a musician whose glorious future Roqueplan was unable to foresee—Charles Gounod, who reappeared with no better success at the début of the next Direction with *La Nonne sanglante* (Oct. 18, 1854),

that opera by Scribe and Germain Delavigne the libretto of which had been offered successively to Meyerbeer, Halévy, Clapisson, Verdy, Grisar, Berlioz, and Félicien David.

The Civil List had then taken in hand the supreme management of the Académie de musique (*redivivus impériale*), and allowed a subvention of 900,000 francs to the Director. The least that can be said of this period, evidently a most brilliant one, is that it left nothing which might be turned to profit at the present time. The Opéra let Gounod take his *Faust* to Carvalho's Théâtre-Lyrique (1859), and then accepted his *La Reine de Saba*, which disappeared after fifteen performances (1862); and was not able to maintain *Tannhäuser*, whose failure retarded our musical evolution by thirty years. This situation was quite similar to that of the revolutionary epoch; in the artistic field the Opéra was outdistanced and, so to speak, replaced by Carvalho and his Théâtre-Lyrique, as it had been formerly by Feydeau. Under the direction of Royer and Perrin (1856, 1862-70) we can mention scarcely three or four works whose titles mean anything to us to-day: *l'Africaine*, *Hamlet*, *Faust* (imported from the Théâtre-Lyrique in 1869), and *Coppélia*, given on March 25, 1870. It would appear that on the eve of the war a revival of Gluck's *Armide* was planned; but, on a similar experiment in 1861, *Alceste* had met with little success, although it had had some few representations, thanks to Mme. Viardot, who had previously rehabilitated *Orphée* at Carvalho's theatre—and so a ballet had to be tacked on to it in order to realize presentable receipts! The same thing happened five years later; beginning with the fourth performance, the production was limited to the first two acts!

V

After the war and the Commune the Opéra (now the Académie nationale de musique) dwelt two years longer in the rue Le Peletier—until the fire. Halanzier, whose good fortune it was to inaugurate the new home of the Opéra—in process of construction since 1861 in the boulevard des Capucines—Halanzier staged *Érostrate*, by Reyer (October, 1871), and then sought refuge in the Salle des Italiens, in the place Ventadour, there to await the opening of the palace then being hastily completed by the architect, Charles Garnier.

On January the 5th, 1875, with the utmost pomp and ceremony, the Third Republic inaugurated the New Opéra, fresh from the builders' hands, in the presence of the Lord Mayor of

London. The grand stairway, the foyer with its much-admired frescos by Baudry, the auditorium all a-shimmer with gilding, sufficed to attract the crowd for some months; the Exposition of 1878 soon deluged the fortunate Halanzier with a flood of receipts hitherto unknown. After Lully, Halanzier was the third Director able to retire with a fortune; he made haste to do so when the Exposition closed. But, alas! the artistic reckoning hardly balanced a financial prosperity unheard-of in lyric annals. Instead of profiting by the influx of spectators who came to *see*, and staging novelties with a future or reviving classic works, the management contented itself with deploying, in the new Opéra, the repertory of the time of Louis-Philippe—Rossini, Meyerbeer, and their consorts. Still, we have to mention the appearance of Verdi with *Aida* (created, however, at the Théâtre-Italien), the début of Massenet with *Le Roi de Lahore*, the return of Gounod with *Polyeucte*, and the success of Delibes' delightful ballet *Sylvia*.

Vaucorbeil succeeded Halanzier. The directorate of this musician—for Vaucorbeil was a composer—lasted for five years and ended with a deficit of a million and a half; but at least it had augmented the repertory with *Françoise de Rimini* (Ambroise Thomas), *Henry VIII* (Saint-Saëns), *Namouna* (Lalo), and *Le Korrigane* (Widor).

Following a short interregnum, during which the administration of the Beaux-Arts merely increased the deficit, it became necessary to find a new Director; two were discovered, in the persons of Ritt and Gailhard. For the latter, who died quite recently, there now began an almost uninterrupted directorial career extending over twenty-four years, sometimes with and sometimes without associates. Though the closing septennates of Pierre (called Pedro) Gailhard were prosperous, the inception of the first was attended by no little difficulty. But the Exposition of 1889 came to repair the breaches in the budget; Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, borrowed from the Opéra-Comique, which had taken it over from the older Théâtre-Lyrique, had no fewer than sixty-three performances in one year, escorted by *Faust* with twenty-four. The sole novelty was *La Tempête*, by Ambroise Thomas, the earlier repertory still providing *Guillaume Tell*, *Robert*, *La Juive*, *Les Huguenots*, *La Favorite*, *Le Prophète*, *l'Africaine*, *Hamlet*, *Coppélia*, *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, interspersed with several later works by French composers—*Le Cid*, by Massenet; *Sigurd*, by Reyer (created at the Monnaie in Brussels); and *Patrie*, by Paladilhe.

In spite of all the talent of our composers—to whom the great concerts gave a warmer welcome than the theatre (and the Exposition could not last for ever!)—it was shortly recognized that something was wrong, that a lyric crisis impended that must be met at all hazards. The situation bore a certain resemblance to the one which we noted particularly before the advent of Gluck, or that of Rossini.

A name of worldwide celebrity was lacking on the programs of the Opéra; the symphonic concerts had long since possessed themselves of this name, and, from 1887 onward, a perception commenced to dawn—with Alexandre Dumas, Léo Delibes, Paladilhe, Lalo, d'Indy, *e tutti quanti*—that there is no more use in quarreling with one's ears than with one's stomach, and that it was rather humiliating that Paris should be the only capital where *Lohengrin* was not a feature of the repertory, like *Le Domino noir* or *Les Huguenots*. Gailhard fell in with this opinion—more from interest than from conviction, it appears—towards the end of his first directorate. On Oct. 16, 1891, *Lohengrin*—hissed at the Eden, under the direction of Lamoureux, in 1887; for extra-musical reasons—*Lohengrin*, by Wagner, was produced at the Opéra, and furnished no fewer than thirty-five representations in two and one-half months. Then Bertrand began his septennate. With Édouard Colonne as musical director, he set out with the intention of making the theatre accessible to the multitude. Alas! this praiseworthy intention cost him, in fifteen months, more than a half-million. He was obliged to give it up and recall Gailhard, who was sole Director from 1899 to 1908. Now the rich Wagnerian vein was thoroughly worked; *Die Walküre* (which still gave occasion for some protests) followed *Lohengrin* on May 12, 1893; then came *Tannhäuser*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Siegfried*, *Tristan*, so that finally nothing further was left to be staged but *Rheingold*, *Götterdämmerung*, and *Parsifal*. And this was accomplished by Messrs. Messager and Broussan, whose stormy directorate came to a close at the declaration of war, which supervened in the nick of time, as they had already offered their resignation to the ministry on July 11, 1914.

The "Wagner question" was the one most prominently before the musical world in the nineteenth century. The multifarious personality of the poet-musician, reformer, critic, and, above all, man of the stage, known as Richard Wagner, was bound to arouse violent polemics and passionate admiration the world over. It was not only at Paris that Wagner was hissed during his lifetime, but also at Berlin and Vienna. It is not sufficiently

known, in France, what difficulties, what hostility, the art of Wagner encountered beyond our frontiers. If we add that in France, for reasons of a more commercial than patriotic nature, the press was busy in stirring up certain personal animosities in order to keep his works away from the Opéra (even while they were already playing in the provinces, at Lyons, at Rouen, at Nantes!), we need not be surprised at the delay of this theatre in adopting him. It was a great mistake, whose consequences heavily handicapped the French School. Had Wagner been known in Paris as early as in Brussels or London, our composers, who were imitating him with the best intentions in the world while awaiting his appearance, would have sought another path twenty years sooner.

What, in fact, do we observe towards 1890? At that time our lyric stage was affected by various tendencies. The "grand opera" according to Scribe still formed the foundation of the repertory; beside this, an eclectic school (Gounod, Bizet, who was accused of Wagnerism) follows very nearly the same esthetic lines, with the difference that the libretto of Scribe was succeeded by that of Barbier and Carré. These two inseparable librettists drew less upon history and passing events than their illustrious predecessor; they preferred, for the most part, to adapt Goethe or Shakespeare, which exempted them from overtaking their own imagination. Gallet, a less prolific librettist, had a fancy for history and legends. In Blau—the librettist of Lalo's *Roi d'Ys* (which the Opéra would not or could not acquire), of Reyer's *Sigurd*, of Massenet's *Le Cid* and *Le Mage*—we note the search after a different formula; the historical subject loses ground; following Wagner, of whom neither the works nor the theories are unknown, we find attempts to treat legendary subjects in his manner, to substitute our ancient Northern mythology for the antique classic mythology; going back to our ancient legends, our writers seek, like the poet-musician, for the "purely human," detached from the limitations of time and place; the musician, on his part, strives after continuous melody, the combination of leading motives. Thus we get *Gwendoline*, by Chabrier; *La Cloche du Rhin*, by Samuel Rousseau; *La Burgonde*, by Paul Vidal; *l'Étranger*, and later *Fervaal*, by Vincent d'Indy.

"Profitless labor," as Mime sings while trying to weld together the sword of Sigmund. The public prefers the original to the imitation, and from the day that *Siegfried* appears, it no longer cares to hear *Sigurd*.

As an indirect result of Wagnerism, our theatres could successfully return to Mozart and Gluck, to Weber and Beethoven,

who had been almost entirely expunged from the repertory since the disappearance of the Théâtre-Lyrique and the fire in the rue Le Peletier.

A further tendency was realism; however, being more at its ease in the Opéra-Comique, it showed itself for only a brief space at the Opéra, with *Messidor* (by Émile Zola and Alfred Bruneau). Here, too, Zola takes an excursion into the marvellous and legendary in his conception of the lyric drama.

Finally, and closer to our time, another foreign influence which, under certain aspects, is a return to our eighteenth century, brought a new springtide into our conception of the ballet and the "spectacle" in general. The Russian ballets performed for several seasons at the Châtelet, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, even at the Opéra, breathed new life into choregraphy, and influenced both decorator and costumer. For the oldtime traditional decorations, for the perpetual ocular deceptions, often poverty-stricken and futile, a genial imagination has substituted characteristic tableaux, in pure and striking colors which harmonize with the costumes, which are themselves realizations of new ideas or revivals from our choregraphic past.

Do we owe to the Russian ballet, or to suggestions from the historians of French music, the attempted resuscitation of a score by Rameau? However this may be, after Gailhard's revival of *Armide*, by Gluck, Messrs. Messager and Broussan went back fifty years further and staged *Hippolyte et Aricie*. Moreover, they augmented the repertory with Wagner's Tetralogy and *Parsifal*, Richard Strauss's *Salomé*, and *La Damnation de Faust*, by Berlioz (which last has never had a very suitable stage-setting); and several other interesting scores—*Monna Vanna*, by Maeterlinck and Février; *Le Miracle*, by Gheusi, Mérané and Georges Huë; *La Forêt*, by Laurent Tailhade and Savart; *Scémo*, by Charles Méré and Bachelet; *La Fête chez Thérèse*, by Reynaldo Hahn; etc.

M. Jacques Rouché, who was prematurely called to take charge of the Opéra on Sept. 1, 1914, found his installation adjourned *sine die* by the war. He took the risk of reopening the theatre toward the end of 1915, publishing a program whose originality outdoes those of his predecessors; he undertook nothing less than to pass in review the entire body of French dramatic music—even to go back beyond its inception, and reconstitute the musical *divertissements* of the middle ages¹. Up to the present, circumstances have permitted the realization of only a very small part of this program; in this there have been paraded, in a series

¹See THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY for January, 1918, p. 150 *et seq.*

of concerts in the costumes of the period, enlivened by some scenic play, the *virtuosi* of Mazarin, the musicians of Mlle. de Nabtes and the wealthy Mæcenas of La Pouplinière, and the contemporaries of Cherubini, these phantoms of the past representing various episodes in our musical history from Louis XIV down to Louis-Philippe. Fragments of numerous French works, ancient and modern, which the finances of the theatre did not permit of producing in their entirety, likewise appeared during this first season. The revival of Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* (March 21, 1919) is more than an assurance for the future. Beside Rameau, thus resuscitated in its two hundred and fiftieth year of existence, the Académie nationale de musique et de danse has placarded only two foreign names, Rossini and Verdi, with *Guillaume Tell*, *Aida*, and *Rigoletto*.

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"The Comédie-Française (thus wrote Émile Augier in the *Paris-Guide*, 1867) has the honor of being, after the Académie française, the sole institution of the ancien régime which deserved to survive it; looking back on two centuries of life, a longevity of growing rarity with us, it is not simply a national monument, but an historical monument, intimately associated with the history of our literature."

Mutatis mutandis, these lines may be literally applied to our Académie nationale de musique, whose longevity, almost equal to that of the Théâtre français, seems to be unknown to the author of "Un jeune homme pauvre." An institution of the ancien régime, having survived all the overturns in the political and artistic worlds, the theatre of Lully is, like that of Molière, a national, an historic monument; consequently, its activities surpass in importance those of the majority of the great European stages, of more recent origin. Down to the close of the reign of Louis XV, the Opéra was national quite as much as royal; only French, or reputedly French, composers appeared on its stage. The incursion of the Italian *bouffons*, while having certain influences on the composers and the singers, left no trace on the repertory. But, like all the privileged institutions of that period, the Académie royale de musique bore in its very constitution incurable infirmities. Relying too exclusively on the potency of its monopoly, this very arm was turned against itself. It finds rivals and competitors, formerly scorned, in these barnstormers, these Italians who have gathered strength and found protectors,

despite continual harassments, and who will soon lay down the law for it. Indeed, one may well ask what would have become of the Opéra without the advent of Gluck, by command of Marie Antoinette, in 1774.

Together with the Revolution and the modern epoch, Italianism, cosmopolitanism, corresponding to the mentality of a new society and corrupting French taste, take their revenge on the classicism of Gluck and his following, to the vast detriment of French composers. These latter, excepting Auber, Halévy, and later Gounod, could not make head against the Italo-Teutonic invasion. Hence they had no other refuge than the Opéra-Comique and, nearer to our time, the Théâtre-Lyrique and the grand symphonic concerts.

The present epoch marks a new critical date in the history of our Opéra. Rightly or wrongly, the general public—if not the composers, for whom happily there are no frontiers—would fain turn a deaf ear to contemporary Austro-Germanic music; but, wishing not to go on any longer depriving themselves “of a music which cannot be replaced by that of the Allies,” as Joséphin Péladan sadly remarked in 1915, the dilettanti will gladly grant admission—from Gluck to Wagner, inclusive—to composers belonging to the public domain.

Our great lyric stage ought, therefore, to shake off the inertia in which it has indulged itself for over a century, since it has merely promoted the sanctioning and signaling of recognized talents on other French and foreign stages.

Talent is not lacking; but it takes the general public a long time to recognize it, for there is a national tradition to be rewelded, to be recreated, a nation to be re-educated. Between the Wagnerian epopee and veristic vulgarity our School has its mission to fulfill, and it ought not merely, as of old, to be swayed by outside influences, to content itself with an insipid eclecticism, with a conciliatory golden mean conformable to our geographical position; it owes it to itself to take the lead of the universal movement in the lyric theatre, as it has done in symphonic music.

By generously welcoming the young musicians of our time, the Académie nationale de musique et de danse would simply be reverting to the traditions on which, during the first century of its long career, were reared its greatness and its worldwide fame.

(Translated by Theodore Baker.)